

Samuel

Samuel was one of those magnificent characters in scripture who are content to fill a minor role.

Samuel was a man willing to be used by God as the vehicle for great blessings for other people.

Without Samuel's influence it is unlikely that King David would have been a man who made such a deep impression on the spiritual life of Israel.

The specific purpose of this article is for us to know this humble servant of God, so that we can relate to him as we see parallels in our own life since God called us to become a Christian.

I would like to help you know Samuel so well that when we meet him in the future we will be able to greet him as a friend.

As with all whom God chooses to be great spiritual leaders, Samuel was carefully chosen and given early training in a right environment.

Samuel's parents –

Samuel's father was Elkanah [meaning "*God has obtained or purposed*"]. He was an Ephraimite who lived in the rugged hill country of Ramathaim.

A Levite – not part of the Aaron line who served at the altar but Josepham who were doorkeepers and musicians of the tabernacle and temple.

Samuel's mother Hannah [meaning "*merciful and favoured by God*"] one of the two wives of Elkanah who had been barren for a long time but who was most loved by her husband. [1 Samuel 1:5]

"*Double portion*" only given to pregnant or nursing mothers or honoured guests.

This favour given by Elkanah only increased the jealousy of Peninnah [meaning "*pearl*" or "*coral*" – a valuable person but a bit sharp at times!!]

1 Samuel 1:10-11 [NIV] "*In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, 'O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.'*"

Hannah brought her problem to God in prayer and made a vow before God.

Hannah's song of praise [1 Samuel 2:1-10] shows how well she knew and loved God and that prayer was a natural way of life for her.

1 Samuel 1:9 [NIV] "*Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple.*"

Shiloh a city in Ephraim is where the Tabernacle remained during the time of Joshua to Samuel.

The Tabernacle seems to have been made more permanent by the addition of an entrance where Eli sat to judge the peoples problems and disputes.

1 Samuel 1:10-18 [NIV] "*In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, 'O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all*

the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.’ As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, ‘How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.’ ‘Not so, my lord,’ Hannah replied, ‘I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.’ Eli answered, ‘Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.’ She said, ‘May your servant find favour in your eyes.’ Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.”

Hannah prayed as near as she was allowed to go, to the Tabernacle that represented the presence of God.

The fact that Eli thought that Hannah was drunk reflects the religious state of the nation at that time.

This degrading situation is backed up by the conduct of Eli’s sons. [1 Samuel 2:12, 22]

This religious background makes Samuel’s parents stand out as different more than ever.

1 Samuel 1:21 [NIV] *“When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfil his vow,”*

The statement *“his vow”* shows that Elkanah was totally involved in the dedication of Samuel to a lifetime servant of God.

The vow that Hannah and Elkanah made –

Samuel as a Levite would be dedicated to serve God from the age of 25-50 years.

The vow that Hannah and Elkanah made implies that Samuel was being offered to God from before his birth to death.

Not only was Samuel vowed to be a Levite but also a Nazarite.

A Nazarite was an Israelite who concentrated themselves to a life of separation and self-imposed abstinence for the purpose of some special service for God.

There was two classes of Nazarite –

Temporary – which was far more common limited to 30 days upwards.

Perpetual – there is recorded only three men who took this vow, Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist.

Three things that distinguished a Nazarite –

- a) Giving up of all products of the vine, wine but also plain grapes.
- b) No hair on the body to be cut during the period of the vow.
- c) Avoidance of contact with any dead body.

1 Samuel 1:19-20 [NIV] *“Early the next morning they arose and worshipped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, ‘Because I asked the LORD for him.’”*

Samuel's name meaning "asked of God" was to be a constant reminder for him of why he was born.

1 Samuel 2:11 [NIV] *"Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the LORD under Eli the priest."*

The Hebrew word translated "minister" is "shâ'ath" means to attend to menial tasks, a very low and humble beginning to Samuel's life of serving His Creator God.

A great contrast to Eli's sons who misused the office of their father. [**2 Samuel 2:12-17**]

1 Samuel 2:18 [NIV] *"But Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod."*

The ephod was originally only worn by the High Priest, but eventually worn by others doing priestly duties. [**2 Samuel 6:14**]

1 Samuel 2:26 [NIV] *"And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the LORD and with men."*

Samuel grew in the respect for him in the eyes of the people as he humbly served God.

Again this was in great contrast to Eli's sons who were not serving God in this way.

1 Samuel 3:1 [NIV] *"The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions."*

The historical Josephus tells us that Samuel was 12 years old at this time.

The condition of Christianity in many areas today could be described by these words.

Few people are interested in God's Word, the Christian Bible, and few church fellowships have interest in preparing humanity for the return of Jesus Christ and the period of judgement.

1 Samuel 3:2-10 [NIV] *"One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' And he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' But Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.' So he went and lay down. Again the LORD called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' 'My son,' Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.' Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' Then Eli realised that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'"*

The key statement in this passage of scripture is v7 Eli had failed in his duty to teach Samuel inspite of his duties causing Eli to spend a great amount of time with Samuel.

God told Samuel what was about to happen to Eli, his family and Israel. [**1 Samuel 3:11-14**]

1 Samuel 3:15-18 [NIV] *"Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, 'Samuel, my son.' Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' 'What was it he said to you?' Eli asked. 'Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.' So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, 'He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.'"*

It took great courage for this young lad to confront Eli the High Priest.

1 Samuel 3:19-21 [NIV] *“The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognised that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.”*

As a result of his courage and humble attitude God continued to use Samuel and all of Israel recognised Samuel as the true servant of God.

“Fall to the ground” meaning fulfilling what God intended them to accomplish. [**Isaiah 55:10-11**]

This is the prayer and hope of everyone who faithfully serves their Creator God.

1 Samuel 4:1 [NIV] *“And Samuel’s word came to all Israel. Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek.”*

“Came” the Hebrew *“hâyâh”* meaning *“came to pass.”*

Israel ignored Samuel, the hypocrisy of Eli and his sons must have caused this rebellion of the people against God’s Word and His priesthood.

Some of the leadership in the Christian Church today and their obvious hypocritical attitude towards God’s Word, the Christian Bible, is having the same effect among the general public. Christianity has become irrelevant to day-to-day life.

When things went wrong for the nation, the people then blamed it on God.

Led by Eli’s sons Israel grasped at the symbolism of worshipping God in an attempt to get God on their side.

Matthew 15:7-9 [NIV] *“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’”*

Jesus Christ saw this attitude in the people He met with in His day on earth.

All too often we find the same attitude in so-called *“Christians”* today, Christian by name only, **not** attitude of mind and action.

It was never intended that the ark should be taken out of the tabernacle, it was to be kept in the Holy of Holies, only the High Priest could enter once a year.

The Israelites recognised the holiness of the ark but it was being used in this case as an icon, which displeased God greatly.

The sons of Eli desecrated the Holy of Holies by unlawfully entering it and removing the ark.

This attitude towards the ark was perilously close to idol worship.

The ill thought out plan didn’t work. Samuel might have tried to stop it going ahead, but he was not the High Priest so had no authority to stop it. [**1 Samuel 4:3-11**]

The power of God is not in icons and rituals but in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and our yielding to His direction.

Israel’s defeat was followed by the predicted demise of the family of Eli and loss of the ark in which they had put their faith. [**1 Samuel 4:5-22**]

The ark of God became a “*hot potato*” in the hands of the Philistines for seven months, and then caused problems wherever it was taken for the next twenty years.

Samuel wisely allowed the impact of this rebellion against God to be prolonged before he took charge and led Israel in the right direction, repentance. [1 Samuel 7:1-6]

God responded to this repentant attitude and the respect they had towards Samuel, His faithful servant, gave Israel victory over the Philistines. [1 Samuel 7:7-13]

Israel’s rebellion cost over 50,000 lives, but they eventually “*got the message.*”

Samuel led Israel as High Priest and prophet into a bloodless and total victory over the Philistines right up to the reign of King David.

Influenced by his parents, Samuel was a praying man.

Examples of the prayer life of Samuel –

The stern warning that Samuel gave to Saul about taking his eyes off God after being made King came after prayer. [1 Samuel 12:16-19]

Samuel prayed all night before confronting King Saul. [1 Samuel 15:10-11]

Ezekiel 9:4 [NIV] “*and said to him, ‘Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.’”*

Samuel is a good example of this attitude in prayer. [1 Samuel 15:35]

Psalms 99:6 [NIV] “*Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was among those who called on his name; they called on the LORD and he answered them.*”

Samuel’s prayers were answered.

Jeremiah 15:1 [NIV] “*Then the LORD said to me: ‘Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!’”*

God equated Samuel with Moses and how their prayers were answered when they stood before God in prayer.

1 Samuel 8:1-3 [NIV] “*When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.*”

So often the children of a great leader, who has dedicated his life to God, turn out to be very disappointing.

This could be lack of father’s influence because of his total dedication to the job God has given him.

1 Samuel 8:4-6 [NIV] “*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’ But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.*”

As a direct result of unruly sons of Samuel the people wanted a king. To Samuel God was already their king, and Samuel His prophet.

A prophet, Hebrew “*nâbîy*” meaning an inspired man speaking divinely inspired words, that is God’s spokesman.

1 Samuel 19:20 [NIV] *“so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul’s men and they also prophesied.”*

Samuel set up “*schools of prophets*” as a kind of “*moral check*” within the nation of Israel. [**2 Kings 2:3-5; 2 Kings 4:38** Bethel, Jericho and Gilgal]

These students of Samuel are called “*oral*” prophets to distinguish them from the written prophets.

1 Samuel 9:25 [NIV] *“After they came down from the high place to the town, Samuel talked with Saul on the roof of his house.”*

Samuel didn’t just anoint Saul he worked with him and prepared him for his future task of leading Israel.

Samuel had experienced twelve years of “*lone rule*” of Israel, knew how essential a close contact with God was if Saul’s rule was going to be successful.

1 Samuel 10:9-12 [NIV] *“As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying. When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, ‘What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?’ A man who lived there answered, ‘And who is their father?’ So it became a saying: ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’”*

God caused a complete change of mind in Saul, but Saul’s dependency on Samuel was great.

1 Samuel 11:7 [NIV] *“He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, ‘This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.’ Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they turned out as one man.”*

Note Samuel added his name to that of Saul to influence the people to accept Saul.

Saul with Samuel’s help had to prove his kingship to the people.

Samuel urged the people to still look to God as their leader inspite of now having a king. [**1 Samuel 12:6-15**]

1 Samuel 12:16-18 [NIV] *“‘Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realise what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.’ Then Samuel called upon the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel.”*

God backed up Samuel’s warning with a dramatic sign.

All of Samuel’s words recorded in chapter 12 are like an epilogue that Samuel left to those he had faithfully served for many years.

Samuel was now an old man but he was far from retired.

It took courage to reprimand a king with a large army behind him. Samuel did this many times even though it could have cost him his life.

One example of this we find recorded.

Saul had been given very clear instructions from God through Samuel, but didn't obey them completely. [1 Samuel 15:1-15]

Samuel reprimanded Saul [1 Samuel 15:16-23] part of that reprimand was to tell Saul he had lost his job as King of Israel because of his rebellion, that's a powerful rebuke.

Saul made a show of repentance but Samuel saw right through it.

Samuel sealed his message to Saul with blood, the blood that God had told him to shed. [1 Samuel 15:32-35]

God had rejected Saul, so Samuel, to make this rejection clear to Saul, also rejected Saul.

Samuel had personal problems in his life that he had to overcome.

Many of Samuel's problems we will be able to relate to.

In spite of these, God continued to use Samuel.

Depression –

1 Samuel 15:35 – 16:1 [NIV] *“Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel. The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.’”*

Samuel was bitterly disappointed in Saul, and considered that he had failed him.

God didn't want Samuel to *“cry over spilt milk.”*

We should never let our present problems or failures cause us to get depressed.

God was already preparing a remedy for the problem.

Our limited vision often causes us to consider we have been forgotten by God.

Fear –

1 Samuel 16:2 [NIV] *“But Samuel said, ‘How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me.’ The LORD said, ‘Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’”*

Samuel was terrified at the possible violent response from Saul if he openly anointed David king.

Fear is a side effect of depression.

We see a completely different Samuel to what was recorded in **1 Samuel 15:32-33**.

When depressed some of our best qualities leave us.

[An example of this is found in **1 Kings 18:19-40** and **1 Kings 19:1-4**]

Notice how graciously God deals with Samuel.

God told Samuel to make his visit to the family of Jesse, David's family, a routine visit to make a sacrifice for them to God. [1 Samuel 15:2-5]

If we ask God He will release our minds from dread and worry. For He wants us to relax in the confidence that He knows our fears and cares about our mental welfare.

Impatience –

1 Samuel 16:3-6 [NIV] *“Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.” Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, ‘Do you come in peace?’ Samuel replied, ‘Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.’ Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.’”*

God had promised to reveal the right man to anoint as king to replace Saul and Eliab must have looked “king-like” as did Saul. But much to Samuel’s disappointment God said ‘no’.

We all tend to become impatient when things do **not** work out right first time or as quickly as we would like them to be resolved.

Too often this impatience is the result of only judging what we see on the outside.

Also Samuel must have still been tense with fear and wanted to get this job God had given him, over as soon as possible.

God does **not** always choose to act or respond to our request in the way we logically see the situation.

In fact at times God chooses to act in a way that seems totally unreasonable.

For example **Acts 8:5-6**. It was obvious that the Holy Spirit was using Philip to great purpose in Samaria but in **v26** God told Philip to go into the desert!! Which before knowing the reason [**v27-39**] would have seemed most unreasonable to Philip.

1 Samuel 16:7 [NIV] *“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”*

This is the lesson that Samuel had to learn, God looks at the heart, what motivates us, not the outward appearance.

David’s great respect for Samuel is shown in many scriptures.

For example **1 Samuel 19:18** when on the run from Saul, David went to Samuel for advice.

Remember that Samuel was quite elderly at this time so the fact that the young David looked to Samuel for advice, is very encouraging to elderly people.

The fact is that as long as we are still alive God has important work for us to do.

1 Samuel 19:18 [NIV] *“When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there.”*

Two things stand out about Samuel in this verse.

Approachability – David knew he could count on Samuel to listen to him and help him, whatever the circumstances, giving David refuge was putting Samuel’s life on the line.

Self-sacrifice – In spite of his age Samuel travelled with David to a safer place as his spiritual father and counsellor.

This was Samuel going the “*second mile*” [**Matthew 5:41**].

Samuel worked with King David in the planning, organising and running of the tabernacle and future temple. [**1 Chronicles 9:22**]

Samuel dedicated treasure to the temple. [**1 Chronicles 26:28**]

Samuel died a much loved man. [**1 Samuel 25:1**]

Samuel was among those who are recorded as pleasing God. [**Hebrews 11:32**]

Quotation from Hebrew historian Josephus – **Samuel was “*God’s man behind the scene in times of trouble.*”** [page 141 section 5]

Every Christian can relate to this for this is our job now and on into the future.

The key to Samuel’s success was his intimate relationship with his Creator God.

Need I say more?